



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER AT THE EXCHANGE OF GREETINGS**

**WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS\****Saturday, 13 January 2001 Your Excellencies,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,* 1. I cordially thank each one of you for the good wishes which your Dean, Ambassador Giovanni Galassi, has so thoughtfully expressed and presented on behalf of all of you. I extend heartfelt good wishes to each one of you. *May God bless you and your countries, and may he grant everyone a prosperous and happy New Year.* But a question comes immediately to mind: what is a happy year for a diplomat? The world scene in this month of January 2001 could cause one to doubt the capacity of diplomacy to bring about the rule of order, equity and peace among peoples. However, we should not resign ourselves to the inevitability of sickness, poverty, injustice or war. It is certain that without social solidarity or recourse to law and the instruments of diplomacy, these terrible situations would be even more dramatic and could become insoluble. I therefore wish to thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your activity and persevering efforts to promote understanding and cooperation among peoples. 2. The inspiration of the Holy Year which has just ended, and of the different Jubilee events which brought together and motivated men and women of every race, age and condition, showed, if there was a need, *that the moral conscience is still very much alive and that God dwells in the human heart.* In your presence I shall content myself with recalling the Jubilee of Members of Government, Parliamentarians and Politicians which took place at the beginning of November. It was for me a source of great spiritual consolation to see so much good will and so much openness to God's grace. Once again it was possible to see the correctness of what the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* magnificently proclaims: "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, through his Spirit offers man the light and the strength to respond to his supreme calling. Nor has any other name under heaven been given to man by which he should be saved. She likewise holds that in her Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history" (No. 10). 3. Following the shepherds and the wise men and all those who for the past two thousand years have hastened to the crib, today's humanity too has paused for a few moments on Christmas Day to gaze upon the Infant Jesus and to receive some of the light which accompanied his birth and continues to illumine all human darkness. *This light tells us that the love of God is always stronger than evil and death.* This light signals the path of all who in our times in *Bethlehem* and *Jerusalem* are struggling on the road to peace. In this part of the world which received God's revelation to man there should be no resignation before the fact that a kind of guerilla warfare has become an everyday event, or in the face of the persistence of injustice, the contempt for international law or the marginalization of the Holy Places and the requirements of the Christian communities. Israelis and Palestinians can only think of their future together, and each party must respect the rights and traditions of the other. It is time to return to the principles of international legality: the banning of the acquisition of territory by force, the right of peoples to self-determination, respect for the resolutions of the United Nations Organization and the Geneva conventions, to quote only the most important. Otherwise, anything can

happen: from unilateral rash initiatives to an extension of violence which will be difficult to control. This same light is shed upon all the other regions of the planet where people have chosen armed violence in order to exact their rights or further their ambitions. I am thinking of *Africa*, a continent where too many weapons are circulating and where too many countries suffer from unstable democracy and devastating corruption, where *the drama of Algeria* and the war in southern *Sudan* are still mercilessly slaughtering people; nor can we forget the chaos into which the countries of *the Great Lakes region* have been plunged. That is why the peace agreement arrived at last month in Algiers between *Ethiopia and Eritrea* is a cause for satisfaction, as are the promising attempts to lead *Somalia* gradually back to normality. Nearer to us, I must mention – and with such a sense of sadness! – the murderous terrorist attacks in *Spain*, which sully the nation and humiliate the whole of Europe as it searches for its identity. Many people still look to Europe as a model from which to draw inspiration. May Europe never forget the Christian roots which have allowed its humanism to bear much fruit! May Europe also be generous towards those – individuals and peoples – who come knocking at its door!<sup>4</sup>

The light of Bethlehem, shed upon "men and women of good will", also imposes upon us the duty of combatting always and everywhere poverty, marginalization, illiteracy, social inequalities or the shameful treatment of human beings. None of these is beyond redress, and it is pleasing to note that various international meetings and agencies have brought at least a partial remedy to these wounds which disfigure humanity. Egoism and the will to power are humanity's worst enemies. In some way, they are at the root of every conflict. This is especially evident in certain parts of *South America*, where socio-economic and cultural differences, armed violence or guerilla warfare, and the turning back of democratic gains damage the social fabric and cause entire populations to lose confidence in the future. This immense continent must be helped to bring all its human and material heritage to fruition. Distrust, conflicts and the vestiges of past crises can always be overcome through good will and international solidarity. Asia has shown that this is so, with the dialogue between *the two Koreas* and with *East Timor's* progress towards independence.<sup>5</sup> Believers – and especially Christians – know that another approach is possible. I will formulate it in words which may seem too simple: *every man is my brother!* If we were convinced that we are called to live together, that it is wonderful to come to know one another, to respect and help one another, the world would be radically different. When we think of the century just ended, one thing is clear: history will judge it to be the century which saw the greatest conquests of science and technology, but also as the time when human life was despised in the cruellest ways. I am certainly referring to the murderous wars which burgeoned in Europe and to the forms of totalitarianism which enslaved millions of men and women, but I am also referring to laws which "legalized" abortion or euthanasia, and to cultural models which have spread the idea of consumption and pleasure at any price. If people upset the balance of creation, forgetting that they are responsible for their brothers and sisters, and do not care for the environment which the Creator has placed in their hands, then a world determined by our designs alone could well become unliveable.<sup>6</sup> As I recalled in my World Day of Peace Message on 1 January, we should all use this year 2001, which the United Nations Organization has declared the "International Year of Dialogue between Civilizations", as a time "for building the civilization of love... based upon the recognition that there are values which are common to all cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the person" (No. 16). But what do we have more deeply in common than our human nature? *Yes, at the dawn of this millennium, let us save man!* Let us together, all of us, save humanity! It is up to the leaders of societies to safeguard the human race, ensuring that science is at the service of the human person, that people are never objects to be manipulated or to be bought and sold, that laws are never determined by commercial interests or by the selfish claims of minority groups. Every age of human history has seen humanity tempted to inhabit a self-enclosed world in an attitude of self-sufficiency, domination, power and pride. But in our own time this danger has become still greater in man's heart, as people believe that through the efforts of science they can become the masters of nature and of history.<sup>7</sup> It will always be the task of believing communities to state publicly that no

authority, no political programme and no ideology is entitled to reduce human beings to what they can do or produce. It will always be the imperative duty of believers to remind everyone in all situations of *the inalienable personal mystery of every human being*, created in the image of God, able to love as Jesus did. Here I would like to say to you once more and, through you, to say once more to the governments which have accredited you to the Holy See, that *the Catholic Church is determined to defend the dignity, the rights and the transcendent dimension of the human person*. Even if some are reluctant to refer to the religious dimension of human beings and human history, even if others want to consign religion to the private sphere, even if believing communities are persecuted, Christians will still proclaim that religious experience is part of human experience. It is a vital element in shaping the person and the society to which people belong. This is why the Holy See has always been vigorous in defending freedom of conscience and religious liberty, at both the individual and social level. The tragic experience of the Christian community in Indonesia or the blatant discrimination suffered by believing communities, both Christian and non-Christian, in some countries under Marxist or Islamic control summon us to vigilance and unflinching solidarity.<sup>8</sup> These are the reflections prompted by this traditional meeting which enables me in some way to address all the peoples of the earth through their best qualified representatives. I ask that you communicate to all your fellow countrymen and to your national governments the prayerful good wishes of the Pope. Through this history of which we are the protagonists, let us chart the course of the millennium now beginning. Together, let us help one another to live a life worthy of the vocation that is ours, *the vocation of forming a great family, happy in the knowledge that it is loved by a God who wants us to be brothers and sisters!* May Almighty God bless you and those who are dear to

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you!

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